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SUBJECT: JERRY ON JERRY: AMBASSADOR CALLS ON FLT. LT.
RAWLINGS

Classified By: POLOFF GARY PERGL FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Ambassador called on former Ghanaian president Jerry J. Rawlings as part of his outreach efforts to convey U.S. neutrality vis a vis the Ghanaian elections to all major political parties. In a marathon session that lasted more than two hours, Rawlings gave an Oscar-worthy performance whose primary themes were the suffering of the Ghanaian people caused by the multitude of failures of the ruling party, the unfathomable treachery of Western nations--especially the UK and the US--for embracing a corrupt and undemocratic administration, the unforgivable silence of the international media for not exposing the government's shortcomings, and the inevitable rising up of the people to free themselves from the oppressive yoke of an unjust and uncaring regime. At times blustering, at times approaching tears, occasionally wistful, frequently enraged, always agitated, rambling and rife with non-sequiturs, Rawlings delivered a masterful piece of performance art that was all about Jerry and never once was blemished by the name of his party's candidate or its platform. On two occasions, he mentioned the four-letter word "coup" in the context of the will of the people. Despite his posturing, Embassy believes that Rawlings has little influence over the future of the NDC. Following the onslaught, Ambassador delivered his message of a continuing strong relationship with Ghana no matter who wins, as long as elections are free and fair and the loser respects the will of the people. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Ambassador made a courtesy call on Rawlings November 18 at his spacious residence in the heart of Accra. With aides Kofi Adams and James Victor Gbeho (U.N. Permrep and Foreign Minister under Rawlings in the 1990s) on hand to fill in details about specific NPP abuses, Rawlings launched into an impassioned and generalized diatribe against the current government's greed, corruption, and abuse of power. He reserved special contempt for western governments that he said had embraced President Kufuor, especially President Bush, former Prime Minister Tony Blair, and England's Queen Elizabeth, accusing them of giving the president "grounds for continuing to misbehave." (NOTE: Rawlings could hardly bring himself to utter the word "Kufuor," and on several occasions, when referring to NPP presidential candidate Nana Akufo-Addo, he turned to his aides, snapping his fingers as though trying to pull a thought from the air, saying, "you know, what's his name, that short one" -- to which his aides obediently supplied the name. END NOTE) The image of Kufuor in the White House, with the U.S. President's arm around him, still disturbed Rawlings. "Bush called him 'a man of honesty' and 'a man of integrity,'" Rawlings said with derision. "My God, isn't the Ambassador telling his President what's really going on?" Kufuor knows that a coup is possible, Rawlings continued, but "Bush buys him time, restrains anger. The people think if the white man, if America says he's okay, then everything must be all right."

¶3. (C) Rawlings repeatedly brought up the suffering of the

Ghanaian populace, saying that people were going to bed hungry, the government was stealing the land of impoverished farmers and salt-miners in the Volta Region, there were no lights in the villages, and Legon (site of the University of Ghana) was almost a brothel because young women could not afford to pay school fees. "Ghanaians are coiling up for an explosion of freedom," he said, "which will turn into an expression of rage. People's power will build to a crescendo, and they will inflict their will." Pounding his fist on the coffee table, Rawlings added, "They (the Kufuor government) can't get away with it. That's why coups happen." He said that in the U.S. and Europe, politics has a self-correcting machinery that eventually exposes the virtues and vices of its leaders. That is lacking in Africa, however, because money can buy power and media influence that then hides a leader's flaws. Will the NPP give up power?, he asked rhetorically. If they try to stay, they won't succeed. Rawlings became most emotional when he spoke of his wife, Nana Agyemeng Rawlings, whom he said the NPP had placed on trial as a means of persecuting his family. (NOTE: Mrs. Rawlings is standing trial on 30 counts of conspiracy and causing financial loss to a public company. END NOTE)

¶4. (C) As if pursued by demons, Rawlings harked back on four separate occasions to the dark days following his first coup of June 4, 1979. He expressed regret that eight generals and three heads of state "had to be executed," saying that he had tried to be as non-violent as possible. On June 4, he said, he had sacrificed two generals in order to assuage rage in the ranks, and later added that he had moved too late; otherwise, the generals would not have been killed. He recounted being ordered to use his fighter jet to fly low

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over Makola Market and terrorize the traders there, which is why the people were consumed with hatred against the military. Upon coming to power, he allowed them to use sledge hammers to destroy Makola Market so they could physically take out their rage. (NOTE: These foray back into history were unsolicited, cropped up randomly during Rawlings' monologue, and appeared to be attempts at rationalizing actions that still haunt him. END NOTE) Rawlings also railed against poor governance in Africa, including leaders of low moral character. He referred to "Nigeria being afflicted with Obasanjo, a man who would sleep with his son's wife," and "that AIDS rapist who can become president of South Africa" as a blight on the continent.

¶5. (C) In closing, Rawlings called on his aides to provide specifics of NPP abuses of power, especially as it related to efforts to stay in power and suppress the opposition. They went through a long litany of allegations, including fraudulently removing voter ID cards from NDC supporters, illegally using incumbancy to advantage, Electoral Commission compliance, and police collusion, most of which Embassy had heard before.

¶6. (C) Ambassador once again stressed U.S. neutrality in the elections, and the enduring relationship with the Ghanaian people. He pointed out that President Bush had a good relationship with President Kufuor, but reminded Rawlings that President Clinton had had a warm relationship with him. He said that our requirement is a good election that expresses the will of the people and is respected by all parties. He added that the U.S. wants to play a positive role in helping Ghana take a further step in solidifying its democracy, and that he expected all parties to resolve any election-related issues in the judiciary. Finally, he asserted that any calls for power-sharing would be retrograde and unacceptable.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Embassy believes that for all his posturing, Jerry Rawlings is a man whose political influence is waning, and that should the NDC come to power, Rawlings will not have even a shadow role to play in the new government. All bark and no bite, Rawlings appears to be a

man living in the past and railing against phantoms. The NDC uses him on the campaign trail as a person who has a powerful draw among the party faithful and especially with Ghanaians who feel economically disenfranchised, but reliable sources affirm that Rawlings has no real influence over NDC flagbearer John Atta-Mills, an assertion that was upheld when Mills rejected Rawlings' choice for NDC's vice-presidential candidate. It is worth noting that during a two hour monologue on Ghana's political future, Rawlings never spoke the name of his party's candidate. Rawlings fits the mold of the African "big man," and has an ego to match. For all the passion that he can conjure up in lamenting the lot of the average Ghanaian, one comes away with the feeling that it is little more than a performance that Rawlings pumps himself up into believing. At times he was almost frightening, seemingly coming unhinged as he ranted on about the current regime. Speaking in the confines of his living room to an audience of two persons, he might as well have been performing King Lear in front of thousands as he bellowed, feinted, and wildly gesticulated. He was exhausted and breathing heavily when he finished (he exhibited a mild palsy and dug into a small case full of medications to pop a Lipitor tablet), yet when walking the Ambassador back to his car, he became perfectly calm and relaxed in conversation. Pointing to the motorcycle in his yard (a Honda CBR1100XX Blackbird), he suggested that the Ambassador might want to come riding with him sometime.

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